

ELVIS FROM THE WAIST UP AND OTHER MYTHS:
1950S MUSIC TELEVISION AND THE GENDERING
OF ROCK DISCOURSE

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Elvis Presley's third appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on January 6, 1957, is commonly accepted as the birth—and the death—of rock and roll on network television. Rock and roll mythology de-emphasizes Presley's many other appearances on television variety programs in 1956. Presley's national television exposure began with multiweek appearances on the Dorsey Brothers' *Stage Show* in January and continued with appearances on *The Milton Berle Show* and *The Steve Allen Show*. Sullivan finally consented to book Presley after losing to Allen the weekly ratings battle in his time slot in the week of Presley's appearance. The fact that Presley's whole body graced his first two Sullivan appearances—or cultural critic Gilbert B. Rodman's well-supported contention that Presley's most risqué 1956 appearance occurred on Milton Berle's show—is minimized, despite the easy availability of visible evidence.¹ Instead, Presley's third Sullivan appearance is invoked to immediately position rock and roll music and culture in opposition to conservative and feminized mass culture, represented in this case by television. Even respected chroniclers of rock and roll history fall into this trap. For example, Charlie Gillett, in *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll*, originally published in 1970 and still one of the best accounts of rock and roll history, avers that "Sullivan allowed Presley on his show provided he wore a dinner suit and the camera was kept above waist level."² Again, visual evidence that refutes this is easily available on video anthologies and on cable channels.

Because rock criticism and even rock scholarship exist in something of a vacuum, little has been written about the impact of television, or any other media besides FM radio, on the transformation of gender- and race-inclusive "rock and roll" to white masculine "rock." The cultural critic

David Shumway is one of the only scholars to recognize the importance of the visual aspect of Elvis Presley's appearances on television in defining rock and roll.³ With this essay, I continue to fill the critical void about the important relationship between television and rock and roll long before the advent of MTV. In particular, I focus upon the impact of television rock and roll in the 1950s on later discourses that inscribed normative masculinity into rock and roll culture.

The selective historiography about Elvis on television in 1956 symbolizes the active exclusion of the feminine from rock and roll discourse, especially as discursive formations emerged around rock and roll in the mid-1960s. This is not a literal exclusion, of course, as women have played significant roles (in one way or another) throughout rock and roll history. The mechanics of this exclusion can be observed in the inaugural issue of *Crawdaddy* magazine in February, 1966. *Crawdaddy* was the first magazine devoted to the critical analysis of rock and roll. Its editor, a Swarthmore undergraduate named Paul Williams, was very clear that his magazine was for those who took rock and roll "very seriously indeed," not the fans who "would debate over who was greater, Elvis or Fabian."⁴ Williams's references to two of the major targets of teenage female adulation in the late 1950s, as well as his choice to ignore the enormous appeal to male as well as female audiences of Elvis in 1956, clearly identifies those who would take rock and roll seriously as male, with the implication being that teenage girls did not embrace rock and roll for its aesthetic merits.⁵ Williams's 1966 broadsides in the hand-typed pages of his dorm-room magazine marked the beginning of the discourses of rock and roll exceptionalism and authenticity that continue to be reiterated and thus retain their abjecting power.

Given the obvious entry, or at least belated recognition, of women as active participants in most aspects of rock and roll music and its industry, why do the masculinized mythologies of rock and roll remain so active and potent? In this essay I posit one possible answer to this not-so-simple question by focusing on the relationship between the television and music industries in the pre-rock and roll and post-rock and roll 1950s. My primary argument is that the gender roles within rock and roll and, indeed, its masculinization were heavily influenced by prevailing social norms as reiterated and reinforced through television programs and representational, industrial, and economic practices in the 1950s. This influence was especially potent at the point where television intersected

with rock and roll, beginning, for this argument as for so many others, in 1956 and continuing through the end of the 1950s. I examine several programs, notably *The Ed Sullivan Show*, *The Big Beat*, and *American Bandstand*, in terms of their reception in the trade press at the time, their fit with the industrial imperatives and conventions of American television in the 1950s, and their later insertion into developing discourses that naturalized a particular inflection of heterosexual masculinity in rock and roll culture. I assert that in critical hindsight these programs, especially *American Bandstand*, caused considerable damage both to the reputation of rock and roll on television and to the primary audience for these programs, teenage-girl music fans. Later rock critics blamed the female fans as much as the performers and the music industry itself for encouraging the musical blandness of the late 1950s.⁶

Rock and roll mythology (along with its implicit demonization of television) remains influential, as indicated by the treatment of the conjunction of the two forms of media in the book *Station to Station: The History of Rock and Roll on Television* (2000), written by the rock critic Marc Weingarten. In light of this point, I offer from Weingarten's book an extended quote about rock and roll on television in the 1950s:

TV's ultimate mission—to sell things—essentially hasn't changed over the last half century, which makes it the most culturally intransigent electronic medium ever created. We need only track the programming history of the big three networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC—against the cultural and social currents that have roiled America over the past four decades to discover how out of touch TV has been in reflecting the other cultural impulses taking place “outside the box.” Rock and roll, on the other hand, was created to provide the insurgent teen culture with a voice and an attitude at variance with mainstream values. It was supposed to stir things up and rage against the decade's complacent, smug ethos, not propagate the status quo. Rock and roll was loud, brash, and impudent; TV was soothing and polite. Rock and roll was sex; TV was violins. Rock and roll was Elvis Presley; TV was Robert Young. TV was black and white; rock and roll was Technicolor—it was black and white only in the sense that it accommodated the miscegenation of pop and R&B. If kids wanted to see youth run wild, they had to go to the movies.⁷

Weingarten's analysis speaks to an image of 1950s television that ignores its historical and other contexts, as well as its ongoing relationship with popular music, including the rock and roll genre. To address this is-

sue, I discuss in this essay the industrial, social, and economic contexts in which the television industry launched these and other music programs of the 1950s in order to complicate the notion that television watered down and thereby “feminized” rock and roll in order to exploit and contain it. An understanding of the context in which these programs and presentations of rock and roll were created and launched is less a narrative of co-optation and containment than it is a story of a new medium trying to negotiate between numerous economic, social, cultural, moral, and industrial imperatives.

The television networks, sponsors, and variety-show hosts of the 1950s needed the audience drawn by Elvis Presley and, subsequently, by rock and roll artists, but they did not need the controversy generated by Presley's unbridled performances. I turn now to a discussion of *The Ed Sullivan Show* in the 1950s and how it and other programs, particularly *American Bandstand*, came to represent the feminizing impact of television on rock and roll. I examine *The Ed Sullivan Show* because of its enduring link and importance to the spread and popularity of rock and roll music in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Elvis Presley appeared on many other programs in 1956 before he was finally invited onto *The Ed Sullivan Show*. His performances on the Dorsey Brothers' *Stage Show*, starting in January 1956, are arguably the most radical and sexualized of Presley's 1956 performances. These performances capture Presley while he was still identified as a rockabilly artist on the Sun Records label, just before he signed with RCA. After his move to RCA, Presley's music acquired a more polished, popular sound. His *Stage Show* appearances also capture his rawness and vitality, which would soon become more of an act as he gained awareness of his power. But Presley's signing by Sullivan meant that he—and rock and roll—had become commercial forces to be reckoned with. Moreover, it is *The Ed Sullivan Show*, not the others, that has become a part of popular memory and consciousness, in large part because of its association with rock and roll.

By 1956 *The Ed Sullivan Show* was an institution. It had no “brow” as it breeched promiscuously the boundaries of high-, low-, and middle-brow culture. For most Americans, the Sullivan show represented the best of culture from both the U.S. and abroad. It drew a huge audience every Sunday night. For performers, an appearance on the program guaranteed mass popularity; for the sponsor, it guaranteed great profit. It was incumbent upon Sullivan, then, to deliver an inoffensive program that

would meet the needs of his entire constituency. Presley, and rock and roll, disturbed the equilibrium that Sullivan had coaxed out of television's inherent conflict between the public good and private profit.

The Ed Sullivan Show, originally titled *The Toast of the Town*, premiered in 1948, the same year as the *Texaco Star Theater*. Sullivan's program outlasted all of the other "great" variety shows of the era, and it remained on the air virtually unchanged in format until 1971, when it was canceled by CBS along with other programs lacking so-called urban appeal. Sullivan was hardly an avuncular figure. He was an ungainly, tongue-tied, nationally syndicated New York gossip columnist. Oddly, this persona contributed to his appeal. That a gossip columnist could become television's most successful variety program host is not surprising. Sullivan may have succeeded where arguably more talented individuals did not because of his particular inflection of the variety program. In many ways, Sullivan's program was closer to the spirit of traditional vaudeville than were the more well-known, arguably better, variety shows of television's early years. *Your Show of Shows* and *Texaco Star Theater* focused on sketch comedy, which was only a part of a typical vaudeville show. Each weekly edition of *The Ed Sullivan Show* contained the same main components as a basic vaudeville show, as well as "something for the youngsters." As the vaudeville historian Albert F. McLean Jr. asserts, "At one time or another vaudeville brought just about every form of entertainment known to man under its umbrella, but its main components were those drawn from early variety shows — skits, songs, dances, and comic monologues — together with some of the minstrel show's humor and the staples of circus programs — acrobats and animals."⁸ Here McLean could have been describing a typical Sullivan hour, minus the overt minstrel routine.

The Ed Sullivan Show and Ed Sullivan the persona epitomized the dual nature of 1950s culture. The program's elevation, in nostalgic hindsight, to the position of sacred text, as well as exemplar of a kinder, gentler time in American culture, is evidence of Sullivan's skill in submerging the contradictions covered over by the veneer of benign pluralism.⁹ *The Ed Sullivan Show* helped to ease the introduction of television into the American home with its (and Sullivan's) particular vision of "something for everyone." Every Sunday night, viewers would be treated to acts as disparate as opera and rock and roll, serious dramatic readings and children's puppets. Sullivan also brought his audience overseas to Europe in an effort to showcase acts that he considered the best that the "high-

culture" continent had to offer to American families. Sullivan's archived papers indicate that he was passionate about his vision and thus took the lead role in finding and booking acts for his show.

As much as Sullivan avowed to focus on pleasing the American people, he was most motivated by the weekly Trendex ratings detailing the number of viewers tuned into messages for his sponsors. Numbers and dollars thus dictated Sullivan's vision of "family entertainment" or "cultural enlightenment." For example, Sullivan canceled a contract for a multiweek series of vignettes by the Metropolitan Opera after the ratings proved to be abominable. Sullivan could rail against certain acts or individual performers as being in bad taste or inappropriate for his core family audience, but he would do a quick reversal whenever he lost the ratings race in his time slot. The paramount example of Sullivan's fluctuating definition of good taste was his very public refusal to book Elvis Presley on the show in 1956. Sullivan had been quoted as saying that Presley "would never go on our show. Ours is a family show. If I were selling cigars, maybe I'd book him, but how many Elvis Presley fans are going to buy new cars?" (a direct reference to his sponsor, the Lincoln-Mercury division of Ford Motor Company).¹⁰ Elvis, apparently, went from being in bad taste to being in good taste, as well as a great car salesman, as soon as his appearance on *The Steve Allen Show* helped that program beat Sullivan in the ratings one Sunday night. Sullivan soon booked Presley for three appearances, paying him an unprecedented fee of \$50,000.¹¹ By the mid-1960s, Sullivan was taking credit for discovering Presley.¹² His later published comments about this and other "discoveries" reveal an artificiality and duplicity that later rock critics would attribute to television as they constructed it, its programs, and even its performers as an inauthentic compared to "real" rock and roll.

Nevertheless, Ed Sullivan and his eponymous program have stuck in American cultural memory for a role that Sullivan played inadvertently, that of rock and roll impresario. An appearance on the Sullivan show in the 1960s catapulted bands into public consciousness, and in the case of the first U.S. appearance of the Beatles on February 9, 1964, it fueled a cultural revolution. But rock and roll's association, indeed need for, Sullivan and his program was fraught with tension, a tension central to the relationship between the television and music industries over the presentation of rock and roll. By the 1960s, Sullivan's program was a necessary evil for rock artists seeking to find an audience or to promote their

latest release. Sullivan's concerns for propriety would translate into a further revilement of television by counterculture critics, especially rock journalists. Their contempt would feed into their ongoing scorn for television as a feminine and feminizing medium.

Rock and roll was a necessary evil for Sullivan, too. Throughout his television career he frequently found himself caught between a vision of his moral mission to maintain an archaic conception of cultural propriety and his overwhelming need to win each week's ratings race in his Sunday-night time slot. *The Ed Sullivan Show* embodies tensions between the public and private inherent in commercial television from the 1950s to the present time. Rock and roll, particularly in the 1950s, posed thorny problems for program hosts like Sullivan, along with his sponsors, and the network and stations that distributed his program, in that it was discursively constructed as an outlaw form of entertainment. It was therefore consistent with the public-interest responsibilities granted to television stations to withhold rock and roll from America's television screens. At the same time, television's sponsors sought to make the most money they could from the medium, and it was the responsibility of figures like Sullivan to make it for them. Rock and roll attracted the lucrative teenage audience to the screen in an unprecedented manner, and thus profit-making trumped public interest—to an extent. By the mid-1950s, Ed Sullivan had established himself as America's paternalistic arbiter of family entertainment. His "blessing" of Presley as "a real fine boy" after an appearance on his program helped to establish a place for rock and roll on television. It also helped later rock critics to blast television as a corrupter of authentic rock and roll.

As noted above, Sullivan's ability to manage the inherent contradiction between television's public and private imperative was ultimately tested, and compromised, by the advent of rock and roll music in the form of Elvis Presley. Presley was more than a performer—he was representative of an increasingly powerful social group, the teenager, and their economic power. Sullivan, along with other television variety-show hosts, were thus forced to choose between social propriety and winning ratings. Ever the scoop-loving newspaperman, he chose ratings. In the meantime, his program, and the errant nostalgia that figured it as a symbol of tradition and ultimately an enemy of progress, inadvertently set the stage for the gendering of rock and roll as a white heterosexual male

form. This process would be greatly assisted by other rock and roll music programs of the late 1950s.

Before addressing these other programs, I first want to note that it is important to understand the various contexts in which rock and roll on television was situated. Televised rock and roll highlighted points of friction between two media that were at the same time complementary and often incompatible. Popular music was an integral part of television from the dawn of network programming, but it was difficult for television programmers to provide an effective visual treatment of music on television outside of variety-show appearances or the insertion of songs into dramatic programs. Rock and roll exacerbated this problem, because its performance was almost too visual: rock and roll artists wiggled the wrong way, or were the "wrong" color and threatened to wiggle the wrong way, for family television. Performances of rock and roll thus challenged the television industry and its sponsors' avowed desire to deliver "appropriate" entertainment into the sanctity of the (white) American home, and in so doing opened the medium to popular, critical, and political attack.

But rock and roll drew teenagers, an important "market in training," to the television set in an unprecedented manner. Rock and roll was therefore an economic godsend for the television industry and its sponsors; indeed, its money-making ability could not be denied or ignored. Ed Sullivan and others who lived and died by the Trendex ratings found themselves in the midst of a Hobson's choice: feature rock and roll performers and risk a degree of public disapproval, or ignore rock and roll and lose money. Needless to say, they chose the former. The trade press of the mid-1950s documents that it was widely supposed that rock and roll was a fad that would quickly die out. Therefore, why not make the money and run? The "solution" to the challenge posed by rock and roll on television was to water it down—that is, to make it more acceptable for mass consumption while the fad was at its peak, then wait for the fad to die out on its own. There was no reason to suppose that rock and roll would not do so, as music fads such as the popularity of crooners in the 1930s and the bobbysoxer mania for Frank Sinatra in the 1940s were contained and faded away. The fact that this move was "contextually consistent" given the era's social and cultural mores, as well as its audience expectations and interests, was ignored by later rock critics who mapped the countercultural values of the 1960s that they espoused onto the very

different public values of the 1950s. Thus the rock and roll television of the late 1950s, beginning with the treatment of Elvis on both the Ed Sullivan and Steve Allen variety shows, and the representative youth music program of the era, *American Bandstand*, was to shoulder the blame for the near-death of rock and roll.

As noted above, the critical hindsight about 1950s music programs espoused by 1960s and 1970s rock criticism was complicit in naturalizing rock and roll music as a white, male, and heterosexual cultural form. As I will demonstrate, much of this programming was targeted to prepubescent females (the much-maligned "teenyboppers"), their older teenage sisters, and young housewives. Because masculinity was not immanent in rock and roll in this (and any other) period, it was constructed into the form as discourses about "authenticity" were created, circulated, and reiterated in the 1960s. As part of these discourses, television came to symbolize the artificial and, in a critical schema ruled by binary thinking, the feminine. Televised rock and roll became representative of the inauthentic, and its feminine, or more accurately feminized, audience was placed in a marginal position in rock and roll culture and discourse.

Rock and roll discourse, emanating as it does from a link to and concern with the industrial, social, and cultural dynamics of popular music in the 1960s, does not take into account the parallel dynamics of the television industry in the 1950s. Television in the mid-1950s was well on its way to becoming a truly mass medium, but utopian hopes and visions for its future still remained. This period has since been constructed as television's "golden age" of anthology drama, strong writing, and the hal-lowed virtue of "liveness" that provided it with a degree of cultural legitimacy that it has not been able to obtain since.¹³ A decision to "water down" rock and roll, if it were a conscious decision at all, was not made in a vacuum. Rather, social, cultural, economic, and audience expectations all came to bear upon programming decisions and conventions.

Rock and roll was a programming challenge on many levels. It was connected to two important changes that would have an enormous impact on all aspects of American life: the economic birth of the teenager, and the civil rights movement. Rock and roll was a musical form that appealed to the new white, suburban, affluent teenager, and it was directly descended from the rhythm and blues music that had been popular in African American communities for a decade. If that weren't problematic enough, the music also had strong roots in the "hillbilly" music of the

American South and the folk music popularized by the left-leaning intelligentsia (who were not the most popular people in the mid-1950s). Through its lineage alone, rock and roll threatened the cozy picture of American political and social life as comfortably pluralistic yet oddly homogeneous, thus espousing a key contradiction at the core of American civic life. As the music historian Trent Hill observes, rock and roll provided a means by which "subterranean social forces" could assert themselves. While rock and roll, he argues, "may have been fine for the kids, for their parents and the other authorities rock & roll was a threatening reminder of the existence of others and otherness that set a dangerous precedent that had to be examined, understood, criticized and controlled."¹⁴

Perhaps the biggest threat of rock and roll was its overt recognition of the plausibility of racial miscegenation. Musical miscegenation could to some extent be contained, as it had in jazz, but rock and roll had a much wider appeal. It was a short step from the fear of musical miscegenation, the primary effects of which were between the ears, to the fear of racial miscegenation, concerned with feelings lower down the body. Rock and roll thus challenged and put into crisis the prevailing racial and sexual mores of the day.

Indeed, rock and roll gave rise to a "dangerous" mixing of the races, physically through the mixed-race revues popularized by leading disk jockeys, and aurally through the widespread broadcast of rhythm and blues music on the radio. Such mixing threatened to upset the prevailing racial norms of the 1950s, in the North as well as in the South.¹⁵ Rock and roll was also, and often incorrectly, articulated to juvenile delinquency, in part because of the visual iconography of black leather jackets, black or blue jeans, and outlaw hairstyles circulated by the spate of movies produced in the mid-1950s to capitalize on rock and roll's appeal to youth.¹⁶

The problem for television programmers and variety-show hosts like Ed Sullivan was that rock and roll's white teen audience was too large and too wealthy for them to ignore. This was compounded, if not confounded, by the fact that the teen audience was hard to reach as well as hard for television sponsors to rationalize. Articles from various industry and business magazines of the era indicate that although there was much eagerness to capture the teen audience, there was great uncertainty as to why. That this was a market with great potential spending power was clear: a 1956 article in *Sponsor* quoted a study by the Gilbert

Youth Research Organization, the leading market research firm specializing in teen tastes and trends in the 1950s, which estimated that year's teenage buying market to be between nine and ten billion dollars.¹⁷

This article, published at the height of Elvis Presley's popularity in 1956, grappled with whether or not Presley and other rock and roll artists could sell basic consumer goods. Rock and roll could do so, the article concluded, but only for a while. As a trend, it would soon die out. In the meantime, rock and roll could "plant for the harvest," that is, condition youth to brand names as they prepared to become adult consumers. Radio was deemed to be the best medium for reaching teens with product messages, particularly about items such as shaving products, cosmetics, personal hygiene products, milk, ice cream, and soda, which were perceived to be staples of teenage life that would carry over into adulthood.¹⁸

The article also claimed that teenage girls spent more time than their male counterparts listening to rock and roll on the radio. Girls were also responsible for a slim majority of record purchases. Radio and television sponsors, the article implied, would be well served by targeting the teenage girl audience. Given the young average age of marriage in the 1950s, these girls would soon be nineteen-year-old homemakers and mothers. Or, if they chose to go to college instead, they would spend an average of \$456.22 as a college freshman to outfit themselves and their dorm rooms.¹⁹ But teenage girls, according to a 1955 Ohio State University study quoted in the article, lost their taste for "hot" music once they assumed adult responsibilities and purchasing power. By their late teens, "their taste veers to the sweet and 'schmaltzy' (viz. Lawrence Welk, Liberae)." ²⁰

The teen audience, especially teenage girls, was well worth capturing, but rock and roll was a potentially dangerous lure, the use of which could backfire on sponsors and stations. Radio play was bad enough, but teens would shortly outgrow rock and roll and move on to more appropriate music, or so it was thought. Rock and roll radio could, therefore, be tolerated in the short term in order to make money for sponsors and radio stations. Presenting rock and roll on television in a noncontroversial manner was much more problematic, for economic as well as social reasons. That television was seen as well as heard opened the medium, the networks, and its sponsors to greater scrutiny and criticism. Rock and roll was more potent, and thus more dangerous, on television. The poten-

tial sales impact of Elvis Presley's 1956 television appearances was clear early on. Rock and roll, particularly in the person of Presley, drew the teen audience to the television screen. It also drew great criticism, which was aimed more at the television industry than at Presley himself.

Jack Gould, the influential television critic for the *New York Times* in the 1950s, fired a damaging broadside at the television industry in an article written for the widely read Sunday edition, published September 9, 1956, after Presley's first appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Presley had been appearing on national television since January of that year. Gould wrote a short article about Presley on June 6, 1956, describing the performer "as a rock-and-roll variation on one of the most standard acts in show business: the virtuoso of the hootchy-kootchy."²¹ In this second article Gould, whose *New York Times* pulpit made him perhaps the most influential critic of the era, placed the blame for rock and roll and its attendant evils on the television industry's pursuit of profit at any moral cost. The headline said it all: "Elvis Presley—Lack of Responsibility Is Shown by TV in Exploiting Teen-Agers." The full brunt of Gould's wrath fell on Presley's performance on the previous week's *Ed Sullivan Show*. Gould grudgingly acknowledged that television was not alone and that the magazine and recording industries shared the blame for casting rock and roll upon the national scene, as well as white teenage affluence, mobility, and hormones. But in his analysis, television, as a medium created and programmed by adults who should know better, had the most opportunity—and necessity—to act responsibly to stem the spread of rock and roll and its attendant social maladies. Television was free, providing easy access to its wares. Therefore, young children as well as teens could be "overstimulated" by Presley's bump and grind. Gould was especially critical of a "perennial weakness in the executive echelons of the networks . . . their opportunistic rationalization of television's function." He characterized the industry's code as giving the public what they want, and he condemned them for abrogating their social responsibility to that end, fulminating that "when this code is applied to teen-agers just becoming conscious of life's processes, not only is it manifestly without validity but it, alas, is perilous. Catering to the interests of the younger generation is one of television's main jobs; because those interests do not always coincide with parental tastes should not deter the broadcasters. But selfish exploitation and commercialized overstimulation of youth's physical impulses is certainly a gross national disservice."²²

Whether Gould's condemnation inspired Sullivan and his producers to present Presley from the waist up in a subsequent appearance is unclear.²³ Gould's implicit condemnation of network executives and his reminder of their social responsibilities likely influenced the subsequent presentation of rock and roll on network television. They could not stop showing rock and roll, as it drew a desired audience for potential sponsors, but neither could they continue to take the blame for disseminating and furthering the cause of a perceived social ill. In turn, making rock and roll acceptable for network television meant moving it further away from its roots in rhythm and blues—thus literally whitening both the composition of its groups and its sound, regardless of the race of its performers.

Moreover, by 1957 it was clear that rock and roll would be more than a fleeting fad, thus making it in the television establishment's best interest to exploit it for profit while they could. Accordingly, the ABC television network—still in the shadows of the giant networks of CBS and NBC and trying to establish a niche for itself—decided to experiment with rock and roll programming in a stand-alone format. Their first attempt involved signing Alan Freed (the Cleveland disk jockey who popularized the term "rock and roll" to make rhythm and blues more palatable to the white audience) for a thirteen-week stint as the host of *Alan Freed's Big Beat*. The program premiered on Friday, July 12, at 10:30 PM eastern time. Freed was signed by ABC after a rock and roll program hosted by the disk jockey scored a solid 13.3 rating earlier that year. The network took special care, according to its programming chief Ted Fetter, to ensure that "the show was acceptable as family fare—screening lyrics and inviting a selected studio audience, culled from Freed's own fan club." Fetter also mentioned that the network had not received any viewer complaints about the racially mixed talent lineup.²⁴

Nevertheless, the program's late prime-time slot owes as much to the fear of televising rock and roll as to ABC's hunting for an available slot. *Billboard's* review of the initial program of the thirteen-week series states that there were no commercials, thus indicating that ABC had not yet found a sponsor brave enough to bankroll a rock and roll program. The reviewer, Charlie Sinclair, opened his critique by gently but decidedly castigating both rock and roll and ABC for the program's mediocrity: "The Big Beat" is hygienic rock and roll. Under the watchful eye of ABC's network censors, the show's cameras view the acts from the waist up.

Forced thus to stand or fall primarily on its minor musical merits, this Alan Freed package frequently stands around with egg on its electronic face." Sinclair continued in this vein, criticizing the program's flaccid presentation of rock and roll while also criticizing the music itself and its audience. Sinclair also questioned ABC's wisdom in presenting a program with little adult appeal that was instead "slanted toward teenagers—who seldom watch TV anyway." Sinclair's pen threw acid on the host itself, too, describing Freed as combining "the unctuous charm of Ralph Edwards with the manic gymnastics of Jerry Lewis."²⁵ A bad audience combined with bad music made for, in Sinclair's view, bad television.

Freed's program did not stay on the air long. This was not due to its quality or the lack of an audience, but because it transgressed television's—and 1950's society's—racial boundaries. Freed had long flirted with trouble by staging gala rhythm and blues and later rock and roll revues that drew racially mixed audiences. Often, the races were physically separated within the host auditoriums to prevent contact, especially mixed dancing. Although it was especially important to maintain this division on television, doing so did not seem difficult because the programs were open to white audiences only. African American performers were not excluded, and indeed they comprised many of the popular bands. According to Freed's biographer John Jackson, the program was after the third week immediately canceled by ABC because of the public uproar caused when its cameras caught the African American performer and show guest Frankie Lymon dancing with a white teenage girl.²⁶ As I discuss below, ABC's timidity and subsequent treatment of Freed would add fuel to the critical condemnation of the payola scandal that ruined Freed's career in the early 1960s, and from which another television disk jockey, Dick Clark, escaped with his reputation even enhanced.

Despite this setback, ABC went ahead with its plans to introduce an afternoon rock and roll dance program. Dance programs targeted to teenagers were a staple of early local and network programming. The renowned bandleader Paul Whiteman was ABC's music director in its early days, and he hosted its TV-*Teen Club* dance program for years. Local stations in big cities throughout the country, including Chicago, Detroit, and Minneapolis, presented afternoon dance parties for teenagers.²⁷ As reported in *Billboard* late in 1956, "Altho record shows have yet to gain general acceptance at the network level, the TV disk jockey format has become increasingly important in the local station market in the last year."²⁸ The

foray by ABC into the world of dance programs launched a television institution—and gave rock and roll on television a bad reputation among the rock cognoscenti until the dawning of the cable era.

Of the many stations that produced local disk jockey programs, none was more successful than WFIL in Philadelphia, home of *American Bandstand*—an afternoon “dance party” featuring local teens dancing to the lip-synched beat of their favorite rock and roll bands. *American Bandstand* premiered as *Bandstand* on October 6, 1952, and it “was a sensation from the start.”²⁹ From the start, *Bandstand* was little more than visual radio, fitting into the early television category of “disk jockey program.” It drew high ratings, as local teens did not seem to tire of watching other local teens dancing. Moreover, dances seen on the program would soon spawn local dance fads. Although primarily a venue for the saccharine white pop music of the day, *Bandstand*, encouraged by some of its teenage regulars, occasionally experimented with African American rhythm and blues music and artists—a trendsetting and taboo move for television in the pre-rock and roll era.

Much of *Bandstand*’s early energy and success came from its host, the experienced Philadelphia disk jockey Bob Horn. A sex scandal involving a teenage girl ended Horn’s career in 1956, just as rock and roll was beginning to make its impact. A young and ambitious WFIL disk jockey, Dick Clark, was tapped to take Horn’s place. Clark’s tenure with *American Bandstand* began on July 9, 1956, and did not end until March 1989. The show itself ended six months later. Clark’s public persona was squeaky clean, as was his vision of the show. When the sex scandal involving Horn broke open in 1956, Clark used his “choir-boy” image to disassociate his program from it. This effort also entailed keeping the show clean and free of any untoward physicality. John Jackson quotes a 1990 interview in which Clark claimed that had *Bandstand* been “a snake pit of writhing bodies,” it would have been “off the air in a week.”³⁰

American Bandstand premiered on ABC as an afternoon program just as *The Big Beat* was imploding. According to a recollection printed in Leonard Goldenson’s autobiography (Goldenson was ABC’s chairman in this period and was instrumental in its establishment as the third major network), his president, Ollie Treyz, was responsible for bringing *American Bandstand* to network television. Treyz, an advertising industry veteran, enjoyed poring through ratings books. On one of his forays into audience numbers, he was struck by the consistently high ratings garnered by a

local afternoon entry on Philadelphia’s WFIL television station. He contacted an associate in Philadelphia and requested a kinescope of *American Bandstand*. As Treyz recounts: “I saw the Kine, and I thought, I can see why. I had a 16 mm Kine projector at home, so I showed it to my kids, and they liked it. I told them, Bring in all your school friends, the girls, get them to come over. I was interested in the girls’ reaction, because I saw girls dancing with girls. And they loved it. They asked to see it again. They loved that kind of music and the dancing, the Twist and all that. ‘Would you come home and watch that right after school?’ Oh, yes, they would.”³¹ If this recollection is correct, it is notable because Treyz’s children, both boys, were nine and five at the time.³² Their “school friends” would have been prepubescent junior high and elementary school students, or “teenyboppers,” not teenage rock and roll fans. *American Bandstand* and, by association, music on television would suffer at the hands of later rock critics and aficionados for being aimed at teenyboppers, pre-teens who had not yet developed “good” musical taste.

In its network incarnation, *American Bandstand* helped ABC—and local stations—solve a number of problems. *American Bandstand* and local dance programs reached the elusive teenage audience in unprecedented numbers.³³ On October 7, 1957, *Billboard* reported that *American Bandstand* was the number one program in its time period (3:00–4:30 PM eastern time) according to the September, 1957, Trendex report. According to Trendex, the program’s 5.7 rating and 35.6 audience share were 62 percent higher than CBS’s numbers and 35 percent higher than NBC’s during those time slots.³⁴ Regionally broadcast and syndicated dance programs were also doing well.³⁵

Indeed, *American Bandstand* drew the teen audience. The program highlighted performances (usually lip-synched) of hit songs by the original artists, white or African American.³⁶ A set of regular dancers soon developed, and the romances and friendships between them became as much of the program’s appeal to teen viewers as the music. *American Bandstand* also drew an unexpected bonanza to the screen—homemakers who were not interested in game shows or soap operas, the other afternoon fare.³⁷ The younger average age of marriage in the 1950s meant that many homemakers were barely out of their teens, if they were out of them at all. *American Bandstand*’s success in pulling this audience also disproved the idea that women turned to Lawrence Welk for musical pleasure upon marriage.

American Bandstand's best asset, in terms of its appeal to television executives, was Dick Clark. A 1958 *Variety* article attributed Clark's success to his "underemotional, relaxed 'all-American boy' personality."³⁸ These same qualities would later be used in rock culture to diminish Clark and his program's achievements. Even more heinous in the eyes of rock critics, Clark was a one-man record promotion giant. A representative of the Dealers of Greater St. Louis, a trade organization of music store owners, called Clark "the greatest stimulant to the record business we as dealers have ever known."³⁹ *American Bandstand's* Trendex rating of 5.6 topped both NBC and CBS in the 4:00–4:30 PM time slot just two months after its national introduction on ABC.⁴⁰

Sponsors were eager to jump on the Dick Clark bandwagon, too. Although the half-hour version of *American Bandstand*, presented on Monday nights at 7:30 PM from October 7, 1957, to December 30, 1957, failed miserably, ABC created a new vehicle for Clark.⁴¹ *The Dick Clark Show* was essentially a half-hour version of *American Bandstand* combined with a liberal sprinkling of *Your Hit Parade*. One of the program's attractions was the weekly "American Bandstand Top Ten," a preview of the songs that would be featured on the afternoon program during the following week. Unlike *Your Hit Parade*, only the hit performances of featured songs were offered, and they were performed, or more often lip-synched, by the original artists.⁴² *Variety*, normally no friend to rock and roll television, published a glowing review of the program's premiere. The review was particularly sanguine about Clark, whom it called "a young wholesome type who makes with hip chatter," and his ability to "gain a hefty adult quotient" for the program.⁴³ Accordingly, the audience for the Saturday night *Dick Clark Show* was estimated to be over half adult. The other half, teenagers, comprised 40 percent of the market for chewing gum, thereby leading Beech-Nut Gum to sign on as its sponsor two weeks into the program's run. An early 1959 article in *Printer's Ink* forecast that the company would soon announce a sizable gain over the previous year's sales. The article quoted a company spokesman as declaring, "I can tell you quite frankly, we hope we'll be associated with Dick Clark for a long time. He's an outstanding salesman, the kind that a company like Beech-Nut welcomes."⁴⁴

This very attractiveness to sponsors, and what was later perceived as the program's, and Clark's, championing of the prefabricated "teen idols" of the late 1950s, particularly Fabian and Bobby Rydell from Philadel-

phia, caused the program's contributions to the spread and legitimization of rock and roll to be obscured and ignored. That is not to say that *American Bandstand* did not "sanitize" rock and roll to some extent. Indeed, the program was complicit in the relegation of most African American artists, except those who could emulate a white pop sound, to the newly reghettoized rhythm and blues category. *American Bandstand* cemented rock and roll as a white musical form. The racial implications of this move on what would become rock and rock culture were skirted over later by white rock critics who turned rock into a signifier of white masculinity and authenticity and denied the implications of its African American roots as much as did Clark's programs.

Dick Clark and *American Bandstand* cannot shoulder all of the blame for the whitening and mainstreaming of rock and roll. Certainly, the program circulated wholesome images of rock and roll and popularized artists who were more congruent with the conservative sexual and social mores of the late 1950s than were rhythm and blues artists and first-wave rock and rollers like Elvis Presley. The cultural historian Brian Ward's observation that the program "stood both as a testament to rock and roll's rapprochement with white middle-class values, and as an example of the dominant culture's capacity to absorb, transform and ultimately commodify 'threatening' sub-cultural styles in accordance with its own core values" exemplifies the usual critical assessment of the program.⁴⁵

Ward's point is accurate but incomplete. The mainstreaming of a cultural form is neither complete nor irreversible. Mainstreaming will always create insiders and outsiders, and not necessarily those that are obvious. For example, the mainstreaming of rock and roll turned it into a predominantly white form of popular culture. This point is generally acknowledged. At the same time, this operation turned rock and roll into a predominantly male and heterosexual preserve of "authenticity" and resistant culture, positioned against the feminized "other" of "inauthentic" and commercialized popular culture—and music—promoted on television. That is, the same white middle-class values cited by Ward as an inauthentic and feminizing influence on rock and roll drew on the middle-class gender politics of the 1950s to do so. Rock's "counterculture" may have run counter to mainstream middle-class values in some ways, but it depended upon and reinforced them in others.

It was, and remains, easier to place the blame on television, teenyboppers, and teen idols for rock and roll's "mainstreaming" in the late 1950s

than to scrutinize the internalized value systems of those who defined the discursive boundaries of "rock culture" in the 1960s. This is not to claim that there were no efforts to contain rock and roll. For example, it may be compellingly argued that it was the payola scandal of 1959 and 1960s, coming on the heels of the television quiz show scandals, that forced some of the pioneering rock and roll deejays, most notably Alan Freed, off the air. Payola, a practice in which disk jockeys received money from record companies to play new songs, was a long-standing practice that preceded rock and roll by almost a century. The music historian John Jackson, for example, traces payola back to 1863. According to Jackson, representatives of ASCAP, the composer and publisher's organization associated with the pre-rock and roll music industry, took advantage of the political and popular outrage engendered by the quiz show scandals in an attempt to shut down rock and roll and its primary publisher, rival BMI.⁴⁶ The only notable rock and roll disk jockey to survive the payola scandals with his reputation—and job—intact was Dick Clark. It is well documented that Clark's business interests were very much entwined with the recordings of many performers featured on *American Bandstand*.⁴⁷ That Clark came out of the payola hearings unscathed while others suffered grave consequences is marshaled as evidence of his fiscal importance to big broadcasting, notably ABC. Jackson reports Alan Freed's opinion that "because Dick Clark grossed about \$12 million a year for the ABC network, compared to Freed's \$250,000 yearly figure for the local WABC radio, there was no doubt in his mind that ABC had a double standard for him and for Clark."⁴⁸

I have no doubt that Clark's utility to ABC, and the television magnetism and savvy that each day attracted teenage and adult female audiences to *American Bandstand*, influenced more than a little the outcome of the payola hearings. I argue, however, that rock and other cultural critics overemphasize *how* hegemonic tactics contained rock and roll in the late 1950s. A more interesting area to explore is *why* it was so easy to do so.

Blaming the mainstreaming of rock and roll on television genres, conventions, and programs and foisting prefabricated teen idols onto unsophisticated female audiences solves but a part of the puzzle. I suggest that the culture was not ready for the generational rebellion and massive social changes that pushed rock and roll firmly onto the scene in the 1960s. Programs such as *American Bandstand*, *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and

Ozzie and Harriet may be perceived as mainstreaming rock and roll, but they can also be seen as paving the way for the cultural importance of 1960s rock and roll. Mainstreaming, particularly of cultural forms, is a much more contradictory process than generally is considered. I suggest that the answer has as much to do with cultural receptiveness as with a program, organized or otherwise, of cultural repression. Hegemonic forces can always be marshaled to wipe out or decrease the power of an oppositional cultural form, but, as in the 1960s, they do not always succeed in full. Why did this work, to some extent, in the late 1950s?

Articles in the music trade, business, and "lifestyle" magazines and newspapers of the late 1950s confirm that rock and roll was very popular among teenagers, generally defined as belonging to the 12–18 age cohort. But while we can comfortably assert that rock and roll was the primary form of popular music embraced by teenagers in the 1960s, their counterparts in the 1950s were not as parochial in their listening habits. Mitch Miller, the artists and repertoire head of Columbia records, noted in 1956 that teens still had a fondness for conventional pop music, for which he cites the enduring popularity with that audience of more mainstream artists such as Johnny Ray and the vocal group the Four Lads. Miller, portrayed in the trade press as an outspoken critic of rock and roll, sought to disavow or at least temper that image by stating, "What is necessary is a balanced viewpoint and a long range view." Miller also noted that rock and roll's popularity "reminded us [the mainstream music industry] of the necessity of stressing the element of rhythm in our pop recordings."⁴⁹ Miller is often pointed to as the exemplar of industry opposition to rock and roll in the 1950s. These observations indicate much more of a rapprochement with rock and roll, not on substantive or creative grounds but on economic ones. Contrary to rock and roll mythology, the music industry did not try to kill rock and roll on moral or economic grounds. They were justifiably uncertain about its "staying power" and its ability to retain the interest of the teen audience as it aged. Given that rock and roll remains discursively constructed as youth music, and that the social pressure, from both sides, is to grow away from it as one ages, Miller's concern is not an idle one. The incorporation of a "heavy beat" into standard pop songs may be viewed as mainstreaming rock and roll, but it may also be viewed as a capitulation to popular tastes.

By the end of the decade rock and roll's circulation via television and radio helped to loosen the grip held on it by censors. June Bundy,

in a January 1959 *Billboard* article, asserted that a survey of network continuity-acceptance heads and recording librarians showed that the "public is becoming more broadminded and censors are becoming more lenient about the lyric content of songs aired over both radio and TV (both local and network) every year."⁵⁰ Such leniency may be interpreted as a result of the success of a concentrated effort to mainstream rock and roll, but it is equally valid to surmise that rock and roll was becoming accepted as a valid form of popular culture.

An obvious point that is apparently lost on those who criticize the teenybopper audience for Fabian and his ilk in the late 1950s is that these same prepubescent girls would form the core of the audience for the British invasion and other rock and roll bands of the 1960s. More was done, then, to "prep" the audience for rock culture than is generally acknowledged. Indeed, in the 1960s rock culture was created and promoted by college students. In the 1950s, this same age cohort, according to studies and surveys, had little use for rock and roll.⁵¹ Girls have always bought more records than boys; without this audience, rock and roll may never have achieved the power it held for some time.⁵² Men were responsible for the discursive gendering of rock and roll in the 1960s, but in the 1950s girls and women drove it economically with their purchases as well as their influence as consumers.

The critical narrative that blames rock and roll programming targeted to teenyboppers, teenage girls, and young adult women for the decline of rock and roll in the late 1950s ignores the salient facts that do not support such a claim. For example, Ed Sullivan is not the only person who "neutered" Elvis Presley. Sullivan, by ordering that cameras be trained on the upper half of Presley's body, provided the crucial visible evidence that is privileged as "truth" of the operation. Little if any blame is placed on Elvis's manager, Colonel Tom Parker, who engineered Elvis's every professional, and occasionally personal, move. In volume two of his painstakingly researched definitive biography of Presley, the cultural historian Peter Guralnick claims that during Presley's stint in the army (1958–1960), Parker undertook a "campaign of scarcity" by withholding new releases to provide the impression that Presley was busy serving his country. The savvy Parker also believed that he was protecting Presley's reputation in the wake of a general slump in the recording industry.⁵³ Guralnick also chronicles Parker's plan to move Presley to the middle of the

road through a series of B-movie vehicles and Parker's choice of mediocre pop songs as Presley's post-army recordings. Parker's impact on Presley's post-army decline has been eschewed by critics who favor a narrative that constructs a dictatorial teenybopper and teenage audience that demanded pop rather than rock and roll.

Many factors contributed to the mainstreaming of rock and roll in the late 1950s, but these have been selectively recalled in order to support the naturalization of the masculinity in rock and roll in the service of myths about the popular form's authenticity and exceptionalism. Rock and roll is no longer the leading music genre favored by or representing youth; in fact, many claim that it no longer exists. If it does exist, it does so in its most extreme forms, championing hyperbolic masculinity and sexuality while reaching out to a small audience of teenage boys. Youth music is fragmented, and if any form now unifies youth as rock and roll did in the 1950s and 1960s, it is rap music, which also is constructed as a masculine preserve. Although rock has fragmented into hundreds of subgenres that often barely resemble the original, it is still regarded as a male form. The male gender of "rock" is no longer as blatant as it was from the 1950s through the 1970s, but the dynamics of its naturalization are still at work in, for example, the use of the term "women in rock" when discussing female rock musicians. The logical semantic mate, "men in rock," is not used when discussing male rock musicians. As I write this essay, the best-selling youth music in the United States falls into the rap and the teenybopper categories. Teenybopper artists such as Britney Spears and the "boy bands" N'Sync and the Backstreet Boys, primarily appeal to prepubescent and teenage girls. Accordingly, these groups, on cable as well as on network television, are the butt of critical and cultural jokes and even some moral panic. Their female fans are as often as vilified as their grandmothers were in the late 1950s. Rock and roll may have fragmented, but its myths, and its constructions of insiders and outsiders, remain curiously potent.

NOTES

- 1 Gilbert B. Rodman, *Elvis after Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 153.
- 2 Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 207.

- 3 David Shumway, "Rock and Roll as a Cultural Practice," in *Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture*, ed. Anthony DeCurtis (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 125.
- 4 Paul Williams, "Along Comes Maybe," *Crawdaddy*, August 1966, 22.
- 5 By 1966, Elvis had not appeared publicly for nine years, and his music had moved in the direction of Vegas pop. His touted "comeback" (via television, ironically) was still two years away.
- 6 For example, the critic Greg Shaw, writing in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*, the first attempt to create a canon of rock and roll performers, blamed this music on "the teenage girls, the ones in the suburbs who wanted big fluffy candy-colored images of male niceness on which to focus their pubescent dreams." "Teenyboppers" thus remain a convenient villain for critics decrying the sorry state of popular music. See Greg Shaw, "The Teen Idols," in *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1980), 96–100.
- 7 Marc Weingarten, *Station to Station: The History of Rock and Roll on Television* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 3.
- 8 Albert F. McLean Jr., *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 21–22.
- 9 See, for example, John Leonard, "Ed Sullivan Died for Our Sins," in *Smoke and Mirrors: Violence, Television, and Other American Cultures* (New York: New Press, 1997).
- 10 *New York Post*, July 13, 1956.
- 11 Sullivan's dismissal then embrace of Elvis Presley in 1956 is well documented in many journalistic accounts of the time as well as in recent cultural history and criticism. See, for example, David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 476–79; Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), 301, 351–53, 378–79; and Gilbert B. Rodman, *Elvis after Elvis: The Posthumous Career of a Living Legend* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 146–54.
- 12 In a letter to Sir Lew Grade, the talent manager of a number of "British invasion" rock and roll groups, Sullivan claimed to "discover" Presley's drawing power "in a 1956 incident [during] my public appearances throughout the United States for Lincoln-Mercury, in the South. I read newspaper headlines in Southern papers about the then unknown Elvis Presley who was drawing record crowds to Fairgrounds. Because I am a newspaperman, whenever a Page 1 phenomenon occurs—whether it involves and [sic] unknown Presley—or the unknown Beatles . . . my newspaper training instinctively translates a Page 1 story into a Page 1 showbiz attraction." Sullivan spun quite the yarn to Grade, given that his initial opposition to Presley was well documented, as was Presley's previous appearances on network television in 1956 prior to his relatively late-in-the-year initial appearance on the Sullivan program.
- 13 William Boddy's *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) provides an insightful account of the critical and industrial tensions as television grew into a mass medium in the 1950s.
- 14 Trent Hill, "The Enemy Within: Censorship in Rock Music in the 1950s," in *Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture*, ed. Anthony DeCurtis (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 45–46.
- 15 This is not to claim that rock and roll had any direct effect on the civil rights movement or in changing the minds of young white Americans regarding racial equality. In fact, Brian Ward, in *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* details a number of incidents of battles between African American and white fans after rock and roll concerts in the mid-1950s, not in the South but in Newport, Rhode Island, and Boston, Massachusetts.
- 16 See, for example, Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988); and John A. Jackson, *Big Beat Heat: Alan Freed and the Early Years of Rock & Roll* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991).
- 17 "Can Elvis Sell Soap?" *Sponsor* 10.21 (October 15, 1956): 33.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 106–8.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 108.
- 21 Gould's identification of Presley with a traditionally female role indicates anxiety at Presley's displacement of traditional 1950s gender roles, subverting the norms of heterosexual masculinity, while at the same time representing sexual potency on the television screen. See Jack Gould, "TV: New Phenomenon—Elvis Presley Rises to Fame as Vocalist Who Is Virtuoso of Hootchy-Kootchy," *New York Times*, June 6, 1956, 67. The cultural critic David R. Shumway characterizes the reaction to Presley's "hootchy-kootchy" as "feminization," arguing that Presley "became feminized because he displayed his body as a sexual object," thus violating gender boundaries. For Shumway, Elvis's self-feminization is transgressive. Rock critics of the 1960s and beyond, I suggest, did not acknowledge the transgressiveness of Presley's gender performance because it did not fit their model of rock and roll as heterosexually masculine, modernist, and out of the mainstream. Instead, their reading of Presley in the 1950s privileged Presley's sexual and racial transgressions as the major points of conflict with mainstream culture. It was also easier for rock critics to displace part of the blame for television's neutering of Presley and rock and roll onto over half of the audience, teenage girls, who were pathologized even by supporters of rock and roll. Those who privileged Presley's sexual threat found it easy to blame those who most needed to be "protected" from it for television's subsequent turn to bland rock and roll programming and performers, most notably characterized by *American Bandstand*. See David R. Shumway, "Watching Elvis: The Male

- Rock Star as Object of the Gaze," in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 127.
- 22 Jack Gould, "Elvis Presley: Lack of Responsibility Is Shown by TV in Exploiting Teen-Agers," *New York Times*, September 16, 1956, part 2, p. 13.
 - 23 Ed Sullivan's coproducer Marlo Lewis claims that the controversial choice to film Presley from the waist up was due to a circulating rumor, allegedly confirmed by an eyewitness. The rumor had it that "Elvis has been hanging a small soft-drink bottle from his groin underneath his pants, and when he wiggles his leg it looks as though his pecker reaches down to his knee!" Presley was therefore shot from the waist up to ensure that his prosthetic self-endowment would not grace America's living rooms. I question the veracity of this account, in that Lewis and Lewis place Presley's first televised appearance on the Sullivan show as occurring in 1955. Presley did not appear on national television until January 1956. Lewis and Lewis also place that appearance as Presley's second on the show; many other sources assert that it was his third appearance. See Marlo Lewis and Mina Beth Lewis, *Prime Time* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1979), 146.
 - 24 "Web Reports Solid Rating for First ABC-TV R&R Show," *Billboard*, May 13, 1957, 34.
 - 25 Charlie Sinclair, "The Big Beat' Rocks, Rolls—and Stumbles," *Billboard*, July 22, 1957, 20.
 - 26 Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 55–56.
 - 27 John A. Jackson, *American Bandstand: Dick Clark and the Making of a Rock and Roll Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18–21.
 - 28 June Bundy, "TV-D.J.s' Status Up at Local Level," *Billboard*, November 10, 1956, 62.
 - 29 Jackson, *American Bandstand*, 19. I am indebted to the Jackson book for much of my descriptive account of *American Bandstand*.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, 37.
 - 31 Oliver Treyz, quoted in Leonard H. Goldenson (with Marvin J. Wolf), *Beating the Odds: The Untold Story behind the Rise of ABC: The Stars, Struggles, and Egos that Transformed Network Television by the Man Who Made It Happen* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991), 162.
 - 32 "ABC-TV's Oliver Treyz: Daring Young Man with a Mission," *Printer's Ink*, June 20, 1958, 56.
 - 33 Technically a local program, *American Bandstand* in this period was a two-hour broadcast on WFIL in Philadelphia. It was transmitted daily by ABC for an hour and a half, leaving the remaining time to local sponsors.
 - 34 "TV Jock Finally Comes into Own," *Billboard*, October 7, 1957, 28.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 - 36 This was not unproblematic, as we will see, and it may have led, in part, to the reghettoization of rock and roll performed by African American artists to the post-rock and roll rhythm and blues category.
 - 37 Jackson, *American Bandstand*, 75.
 - 38 Bob Rolontz, "From Radio Jock to Nat'l Name—How Clark Does It," *Variety*, March, 24, 1958, 4.
 - 39 "TV Jock Finally Comes into Own," 28.
 - 40 Rolontz, "From Radio Jock to Nat'l Name—How Clark Does It," 4.
 - 41 John Jackson theorizes that *American Bandstand* failed as a weeknight prime-time offering for two reasons. First, the teens and housewives drawn to the afternoon version of the program were otherwise occupied at that time. Second, male breadwinners had control of the television dial by 7:30 in the evening, and they were not interested in watching the program.
 - 42 Jackson, *American Bandstand*, 105.
 - 43 Review, "The Dick Clark Show," *Variety*, February 19, 1958, 31.
 - 44 "Beech-Nut Hitches Its Sales to TV Star," *Printer's Ink*, January 30, 1959, 72.
 - 45 Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 168.
 - 46 Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 244.
 - 47 See, for example, Jackson, *American Bandstand*, chapters 5 and 9.
 - 48 Jackson, *Big Beat Heat*, 280.
 - 49 "'Teen Buyers Grow Up,' Warns Miller," *Billboard*, September 8, 1956, 17, 22.
 - 50 June Bundy, "Censorship Eases on Aired Lyrics as Acceptance Grows," *Billboard*, January 19, 1959, 2.
 - 51 "Can Elvis Sell Soap?" 108.
 - 52 According to a 1956 survey of 4,000 teens (12–18) conducted by Scholastic Magazines, 73 percent of boys and 79 percent of girls owned radios, and 60 percent of girls owned phonographs. In addition, 61.7 percent of girls in junior high and 48 percent of girls in senior high purchased records on a monthly basis, compared to 46.6 percent and 41.9 percent, respectively, of their male counterparts. See June Bundy, "Gals Best Disk and Phono Buyers in Teen-Age Bracket," *Billboard*, August 25, 1956, 15, 20.
 - 53 Peter Guralnick, *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), 29.